

Different is Brilliant

Celebrating what makes us different and how we can make a difference together.

Context

“Our society is becoming more aware of autism. We have seen more positive and balanced coverage in art, in literature and in the media of people with autism. We hear about innovative local schemes to make parts of the community more accessible and welcoming to people with autism. The dedicated work of national charities and organisations like the National Autistic Society (NAS), Autism Alliance UK, Autism Plus, Ambitious about Autism and the many smaller local and national organisations and groups who work tirelessly to raise awareness day in and day out makes a real difference. ***But we know there is much more to be done. We still hear too many stories of what is, at best, clumsy stereotyping, and, at worst, discrimination. People with autism have an equal right to a fulfilling life, just like anyone else.***”

Ministerial Foreword, Think Autism – Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives, the strategy for adults with autism in England: an update (January 2016,
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299866/Autism_Strategy.pdf)

Different is Brilliant at Derby College

Derby College is committed to developing learner led Autism friendly processes that will help us to achieve Autism Accreditation, as set by The National Autistic Society, and exceed all competencies listed in the Autism Education Trust’s Competency Framework.

Different is Brilliant at Derby College aims to work with prospective and current learners to celebrate what makes us brilliant: the diversity of our learners and our community. Different is Brilliant supports anxious students’ transition into college, facilitates the awareness of staff and students of mental health and Autism Spectrum Conditions and celebrates all that makes us different and diverse.

During **April 2016** we held 4 events (1 on each of the college’s 4 main sites*). The aim of these events was to familiarise prospective learners and their parents/carers/supporters with the college sites, our support services, our students and our staff. Prospective learners who had expressed anxiety concerns or identified as being on the autistic spectrum were invited to attend these small, safe and friendly events to be introduced to the college, have a tour and take part in an open question and answer session with staff and students.

The event was led by Inclusion Support Coordinators based at each site, Inclusion and Support Specialists, Education Support Workers, Communication Support Workers and students who have been supported by the Inclusion Service during academic year 2015/16.

Evaluation of April 2016 Different is Brilliant Events

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At each event prospective students and their parents and carers were asked to rate their knowledge of the college (out of 10) before and after the event, how they felt ('Scared', 'Anxious', 'Unsure', 'Ok', 'Happy', 'Confident' or 'Great') before and after the event, which part of the event was most useful ('Introduction', 'Tour', 'Question & Answer' and 'Time in a New Place') and were also asked if they would include anything else in an event like this.

Evaluation Results

Attendance:

Site	Number of Prospective Learners	Number of parent/carers	Number of 'others'	Total
The Roundhouse	6	8	0	14
Ilkeston	1	2	1	4
Broomfield Hall	6	5	0	11
JWC	3	3	0	6
Total	16	18	1	35

Of those that attended:

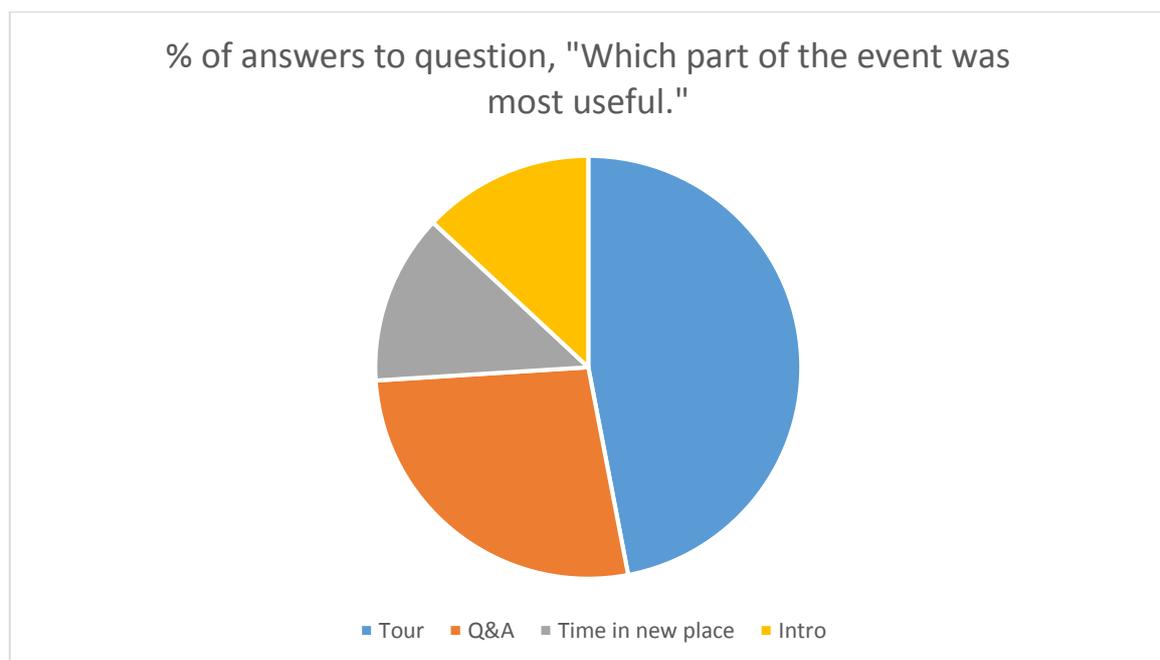
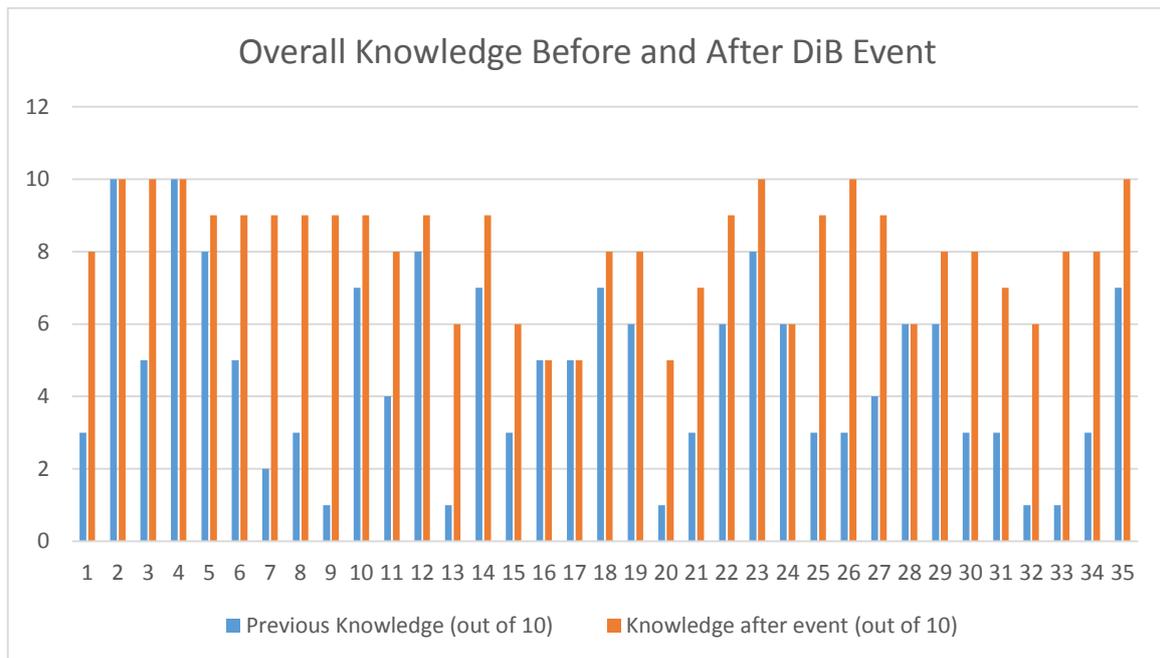
- On average, their knowledge of the college increased by **34% (on a 1-10 scale)**;
- **100%** that were '**Scared**' or '**Anxious**' before the event no longer felt the same after the event;
- There was a **500%** increase in participants that were '**Great**' (comparison between before and after the event);
- There was a **300%** increase in participants that were '**Confident**' (comparison between before and after the event);
- There was an **86%** increase in participants that were '**Happy**' (comparison between before and after the event).

Which part of the event did participants find most useful (more than 1 answer could be given)?

Answer	Percentage (of answers given)
Tour	47%
Question & Answer	27%
Introduction	13%
Time in a new place	13%

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Quotes/Suggestions:

"felt the event was very useful, particularly meeting support staff and finding out about individual plans. Chatting to students was extremely helpful."

"A print-out of the intro <presentation> would be very happy to refer to after."

"A list of contacts would be handy."

"I would get them to play more games and go on the computers"

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“Raise money and build a sensory room.”

“No suggestion – was reassuring.”

“I enjoy meeting new people.”

Conclusion

Based on the evaluation data, Different is Brilliant April 2016 was successful in decreasing fear and anxiety and increasing knowledge and confidence, therefore achieving the 2 main aims of the events. The tours were consistently the most useful part of each event, followed by question and answer sessions, however all parts of the events were valued by participants, and will all be worthwhile retaining in future events.

Based on suggestions, it will be worth considering including activities in events and use of ILT during the events.

The Inclusion Handbook was planned to be launched at the Different is Brilliant events, however it was not ready in time. Some suggestions were made regarding materials being available for reference. The Inclusion Handbook would have resolved this and will do so in future years.

Marketing of the event, which was mainly by email and web-based materials this year, will also need to be reviewed and plans made to increase uptake by professionals who had no presence at any event this year. One suggestion is an increased presence of Different is Brilliant at the Inclusion Team’s Showcase events. Also, although events are specifically planned to be ‘small group’, careful consideration will also need to be given to increasing prospective student attendance.